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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005620

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: PEACE PROCESS, IRAQ DOMINATE CHAFEE MEETINGS IN JORDAN

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) Senator Lincoln Chafee, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, met with King Abdallah, Senate President Zaid Al-Rifa'i, and several Jordanian academics and political activists to discuss Iraq, the peace process, and Jordan's domestic issues on September 1. The King expressed concern that the road map is facing a difficult period given the latest round of violence. He blamed Arafat for weakening Abu Mazen, while Al-Rifa'i placed the blame squarely on the Israelis. During several meetings, the Senator encountered blunt criticism about the U.S. performance in Iraq thus far, and heard differing views about Syria's intentions vis-a-vis Iraq. Charge, Poloff and the Senator's aide also attended the meetings. END SUMMARY.

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PEACE PROCESS: PESSIMISM ON FUTURE OF ROAD MAP  
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2. (C) King Abdallah told Senator Chafee he will travel to Washington in two weeks, mainly to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Iraq. He said he foresees a difficult road ahead, and berated Yasser Arafat for weakening Abu Mazen and Muhammed Dahlan at a critical juncture. He said Arafat's "militant thinking" is weakening Abu Mazen, who has come out firmly against armed resistance. The Senator replied that "demonizing" Arafat is not helpful because he is still a player and we also need to address Israeli actions, particularly settlement expansion. The King agreed, saying that Israel, as the stronger player in the process, needs to make more effort if they truly want to move the process forward. However, he added that the Quartet must reach a consensus about how and whether to deal with Arafat, adding that the Foreign Minister currently is consulting with the parties on this matter.

3. (C) In a separate meeting, Senate President Zaid Al-Rifa'i told Senator Chafee that because Palestinians and Jordanians are "one people," the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence in the territories makes it difficult for Jordanians to focus on internal issues. He said people are "facing the loss of hope" after the failure of the peace process, and that Jordanians are not convinced the U.S. is serious about its commitment to the process. Al-Rifa'i emphasized that active U.S. involvement is critical to moving the process forward, a theme voiced by nearly every Jordanian the Senator met. He said people initially were hopeful that the road map would be successful, but that Israeli actions, including ongoing settlement expansion, property confiscation, home demolition, and assassinations of Palestinian activists, are inexcusable. He expressed his disappointment that recent U.S. statements seem to give Israel a green light to continue their provocative actions. He called on the United States to work for another ceasefire, and complained that the U.S. is not doing enough to rein in the Israelis.

4. (C) In response to a question from Senator Chafee about security at Jordan's border with the West Bank, Al-Rifa'i said Jordan controls it tightly, and only allows West Bank Palestinians to stay temporarily in Jordan. He said Jordan does not want to play into the hands of Sharon and his cronies who want to empty the West Bank of Palestinians as part of their transfer policy.

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IRAQ: BLUNT CRITICISM OF US POST-WAR PROGRESS THUS FAR  
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5. (C) On the matter of Iraq, Al-Rifa'i said Jordan supported the war as necessary to rid Iraq of a brutal dictator, but the situation now is a "real mess." Al-Rifa'i quipped that it is pointless to talk about democracy when basic services, including water, communications, and electricity, are lacking: "If a man doesn't have feet, you don't offer him shoes." Voicing his personal opinion, Al-Rifa'i said that Iraq needs a strong, benevolent general at this point, not an Iraqi governing council, which is perceived as a U.S. front lacking credibility. However, he said that without Saddam in the picture there is hope, as long as "our friends in

Washington will get their act together" and get Iraq moving forward.

16. (C) Al-Rifa'i, Philadelphia University Vice President of International Relations Ibrahim Badran and Jordan University Center for Strategic Studies Director Mustafa Hamarneh separately deplored the U.S. decision to dissolve the army, police, and civil service, noting that there are experts within those ranks that should be playing a constructive role in rebuilding the country.

17. (C) In response to Senator Chafee's question about the ramifications of the Najaf bombing on August 29, Al-Rifa'i said it depends whether people are convinced that the correct perpetrators are arrested. He expressed concern about reports that Iraqi and Saudi Sunni Muslims may be involved, fearing that the bombing could trigger Sunni-Shi'a violence aimed at settling old scores. The King emphasized the importance of positive forward movement towards stability in Iraq despite the setbacks, and said that Jordan continued to pursue leads to determine who carried out the attack.

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DIFFERING VIEWS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS  
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18. (C) In response to questions from Senator Chafee, both the King and Al-Rifa'i believe that Bashar al-Asad has the potential to be an effective, progressive leader, but they noted that the Syrian President is caught between his desire to move Syria forward politically and economically, and the demands of power hungry generals left over from his father's old guard. Al-Rifa'i said U.S. threats to Syria (i.e., the Syria Accountability Act) play into the extremists' hands and isolate Bashar. The King said he is concerned that Bashar is "reading the map wrong," and suggested that Syria doesn't understand its own vulnerabilities in the region. He worries that Syria will instigate problems at the Iraqi-Syrian border, because in his view, Iraqi instability is in Syria's interest.

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DEMOCRATIZATION IN JORDAN CHUGGING ALONG  
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19. (C) The King expressed appreciation for the United States' assistance for social economic programs that he believes are helping to foster the democratization process in Jordan. He mentioned his intention to meet members of Jordan's newly-elected Parliament later that day. He expressed his hope the 30-odd political parties in Jordan would find consensus among themselves to merge into perhaps three or four parties with coherent, activist platforms to attract a wider cross section of the population to the polls for the next election in four years.

110. (C) Over lunch, academics also saw a need for more active, substantive political parties, particularly to counter the Islamist trend, but said consolidation of the parties would be better achieved from the bottom up, not via a dictate from the government. Former Jordan Times editor Rana Sabbagh-Gargour said that the Islamic Action Front is the most organized political party because of its well established social and charitable network provides them grassroots connections to garner support.

111. (C) Senator Chafee did not have an opportunity to clear this cable prior to his departure.

HALE